

use the materials consistent with my environment."

"Besides, of all the people with whom I interact in the city, how many of them do you think would follow me to the top of a mountain?"

KOAN

Kochu was a student of Zen.

One day Kochu climbed up the steep face of a mountain to visit a hermit monk. He found the monk sipping tea in his little hut.

The monk served tea to Kochu in silence. After a few moments, the monk bowed and said, "I am honored by your visit. May I help you in some way?"

Kochu replied, "I am confused by what the people say about you in the village. Some say that you are a great master of Zen and that much can be learned from you. Others say that you are no more than an eccentric old hermit, and that it would be a waste of time to sit at your feet with the hopes of learning anything. Forgive me for repeating these things others have said of you: I only want to know the truth."

The monk rose slowly from the floor. Silently, he beckoned Kochu to follow him. They walked together out of the hut, into the warmth of the sunshine. Kochu was led around the back of the hut, where the monk stopped before a beautiful cherry-blossom tree in full bloom, its leaves gently swaying in the mild summer breeze. The air was thick with the scent of the blossoms, and the stillness of the mountain-side was slightly broken by the faint droning of the bees as they gathered pollen from the tiny flowers.

The monk sat down before the tree, then beckoned to Kochu. "Sit with me for a while, please. Let us observe together the life of this tree."

The student and the monk sat in deep contemplation, still and alert. The monk then turned to Kochu after a few moments.

"Can you tell me how this tree obtains its nourishment?"

Kochu paused thoughtful before answering.

"Its roots travel deep into the earth, where they receive minerals and water from the soil. Also, its leaves receive the sun's light as well as nourishment from the air."